Eliminating Health Disparities through

a Nationally Unique Web Site:

www.healthpowerforminorities.org

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A nationally unique web site, whose mission is improving the health of multicultural populations, was established in 2002 to help eliminate well documented racial and ethnic health disparities. This service oriented web site is located at www.healthpowerforminorities.org. It was founded by Norma J. Goodwin, M.D. and provides authoritative, user-friendly, and culturally relevant health information and promotion services aimed at disease prevention, early detection and control. The conceptual framework for the web site focuses on such key elements as: (a) Reflecting the diversity, and commonalities regarding health and health needs that exist among African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans; (b) Promoting and facilitating disease, prevention, early detection and control; (c) Defining and promoting health as physical, mental and spiritual health; (d) Ensuring the credibility of the messages and the messengers; (e) Ensuring consistent quality control; and (f) Regular evaluation of outcomes, and making indicated modifications. Key web site features are described as well as a marked in web traffic for a non-profit organization – from 48,000 to more than 2.5 million hits in four years. However, the need to switch from non-profit to for-profit in order to achieve the mission is also discussed.

Keywords: web site, minorities, multicultural populations, culturally relevant health information, health promotion, health disparities, digital divide

A nationally unique organization, whose mission is improving the health of multicultural populations, was established by Norma J. Goodwin, M.D. in 2002, with the centerpiece of its operations being a service oriented web site at:
www.healthpowerforminorities.org.

The website provides authoritative, user- friendly, and culturally relevant health information and promotion services to help eliminate well documented health disparities in multicultural populations/people of color/minorities.

The need for more effective and widely disseminated health information for multicultural populations is highlighted by the rapid change underway regarding the demographics of "The Emerging America." The statistics regarding health disparities and the changing face of America are striking. According to the United States Census Bureau (2004), African-Americans, panics, Asian Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, combined will account for almost

90 percent of all population growth in the U.S. from 1995 to 2050. Multiple credible and widely accepted studies document major racial and ethnic health disparities in multicultural populations (Institute of Medicine, 2003; Satcher & Pamies, 2006;. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2000; National Research Council, 2005).

Health Power pursues its mission of improving the health of multicultural populations through the following: health information and health promotion; health consultations and training; and strategic partnerships and alliances. However, the Health Power web site, which is nationally unique, is the centerpiece of its operations.

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The uniqueness of the web site is highlighted by the fact that it accomplishes the following:

1. simultaneously focuses on health issues and interests for population groups of Black/African-Americans, Caribbean Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Asian Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/American Indians, as well as and Alaska Natives; and

2. provides a wide array of health related information on the major contributors to racial and ethnic health disparities, which are contributed to significantly as a result of delayed disease diagnosis and treatment.

Conceptual Framework of the Web Site

The conceptual framework of the Health Power web site may be described as rooted in the specific practices, as described below:

➢ emphasizing disease prevention, early detection and control

➢ defining and promoting health as physical, mental and spiritual health

➢ ensuring the credibility of both the message and the messenger

➢ ensuring consistent quality control – via the establishment and operation of an Editors and Advisors Group, whose members have expertise in one or more health related areas, as well as cultural competence

➢ establishing and operating African-American/Black, Caribbean American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian Pacific Islander and American Indian/Native American and Alaska Native web channels—and celebrating the annual heritage months of these racial and ethnic groups

➢ promoting and facilitating cross-links between the Health Power web site and the web sites of other key organizations that serve or focus on the health of multicultural populations (As a result, they share health related information among their users, and help to narrow "The Digital Divide" through skill building, and increase the likelihood of higher search engine positions and traffic level of both cross-linked organizations.)

Basic Content Structure of the Web Site: Key Features

The basic content and structure of the Health Power web site is illustrated in detail, below. The link specified at the end of the description will take readers to that actual page of the website.

What It Means: Our Glossary

Our extensive glossary explains many health terms, which are readily found in an A to Z index. Descriptions are basic and can, in general, be read within 5 minutes by a person with an 8th grade reading level. This section can be viewed at: http://healthpowerforminorities.org/glossary/glossary.cfm

Food and Fitness Channel

The food and fitness channel has a 3-in-1 Recipe Directory which provides: 1) *Recipes by type* (breakfast; lunch and dinner; soups, salads and sandwiches; pastas and breads, dressings, sauces and salsas, spreads & toppings; desserts and drinks; 2) *Recipes by celebrities and notables*; and, 3) *Recipes by cultural specialties/preferences*. See these options via: http://healthpowerforminorities.org/foodfitness/

Our Major Killers and Disablers

This section focuses on arthritis, asthma, cancer, diabetes, glaucoma, heart disease / cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS,

hypertension, infant mortality, influenza and pneumonia, obesity, sickle cell anemia, stroke, substance abuse/chemical dependency, and violence. See this wealth of information at the following:
http://healthpowerforminorities.org/major/

Lifecycle Channels (6)

Our lifecycle channels are organized into six categories, as follows: 1) Infant and Child Health Channel, 2) Teen Channel; 3) Parent Chanel, 4) Women's Health Channel, 5) Men's Health Channel, and 6) Aging Health Channel. Segmented marketing principles, and a philosophy of "different strokes for different folks" underlie the lifecycle structure. View this section at:
http://healthpowerforminorities.org/specific/

Racial/Ethnic/Cultural Channels (5)

There are five racial-ethnic cultural channels: 1) African-American / Black Channel; 2) the Caribbean Circuit; 3) Hispanic/Latino Channel; 4) Asian Pacific Islander Channel; and, 4) Native American / American Indian Channel. We also have special programming, such as our *Annual Heritage Web Celebrations* which are retained on each racial/ethnic cultural channel, respectively, for their subsequent review. Key to having effective racial and ethnic Channels and Celebrations is the participation of the Editors and Advisors as well as the active *cooperation of highly regarded leaders* and others as Celebration honorees. The racial and ethnic channels are also predicated on segmented marketing principles. See the variety of options for educational viewing at:
http://healthpowerforminorities.org/specific/racial_overview.cfm/

Cross-linked Mental Health and Spiritual Health Channels

We also feature cross-linked mental health and spiritual health channels. The Spiritual Health Channel features a very popular "Choose a Daily Quote 2-in-1 Directory." Readers can locate lists of in-

spiring and enlightening quotes provided by theme and source.

The Mental Health Channel is especially needed because of the stress often experienced by individuals in multicultural populations. This stress is experienced for a variety of reasons, including the stigma often associated with mental illness in these communities.

The Spiritual Health Channel is **a** culturally relevant health information and health service resource. The presence of this channel reflects the strong role which spiritually tends to play in many multicultural groups. See these two channels and the many resources they provide via the following link:
http://healthpowerforminorities.org/specific/mental/mental.cfmhttp://healthpowerforminorities.org/specific/spiritual/spiritual.cfm/

Preventive Health Channel

The Preventive Health Channel addresses issues such as eye care, skin care, sleeping for health and beauty, smoking and health, walking for health, and stress reduction. These options may be accessed via the link, below:
http://healthpowerforminorities.org/specific/preventive.cfm/

Multicultural Health Trends and Other Data

The web site also provides well sourced tales on various health conditions that disproportionately affect one or more of the racial/ethnic population groups. Also provided is key population data, as well as national health trends by racial/ethnic group. This wealth of data may be accessed via the following:
http://healthpowerforminorities.org/info/trends.cfm.

Relevant Resource Table

Another web site feature involves relevant resources. The web site provides information on more than 85 key health related organizations, including, as follows: their mission and key services provided; and,

the geographic area served by the organ-ization (e.g., international, national, regional, state and local). These resources can be seen at:
http://healthpowerforminorities.org/SearchResults.cfm/

What's Happening

Keeping readers abreast of events of potential interest, the web site has a calendar of key health events, as well as days and months of national observance. For example, national breast cancer awareness month, diabetes month, Native American/American Indian month, World AIDS Day, Black History (Heritage) month, etc…

Information on conference events is also provided. In all cases, the web site also provides contact information for those desiring more information about these events. In sum, the web site provides extensive information on "what's happening" with regard to national health events. This aspect of the web site can be viewed at the following location:
http://healthpowerforminorities.org/calendar/calendar.cfm/

Cross-linked Web Partners (25+)

A multitude of cross-linked pages with our web partners permit the sharing of information, while narrowing the Digital Divide, as discussed earlier. There are links to over 25 organizations and their web sites. The list of our cross-linked web partners can be found through the link, below:
http://healthpowerforminorities.org/partners/partners.cfm/

Other Special Features

There are also a number of special features of the website. Descriptions for these special features follow, along with a citation for the corresponding link.

-*A Key Contents list* is made available for convenience, being especially beneficial for users with limited Internet skills

(http://www.healthpowerforminorities.org/map.cfm/).

-*Free brochures* on a variety of subjects are available, including for downloading (http://www.healthpowerforminorities.org/publications/catalogue.cfm); and, there are also those brochures that can be ordered and purchased, including bulk orders (http://www.healthpowerforminorities.org/publications/order_bak3.cfm)

-*Tip Sheets* are available, being printer friendly and, thereby, readily accessible (http://www.healthpowerforminorities.org/tips/tip_archive.cfm)

-A *Quarterly Newsletter* that can be down-loaded for free is made available (http://www.healthpowerforminorities.org/publications/newsletter.cfm)

-*Monthly 'Web Trend Reports* that are received by Health Power to facilitate monitoring of web traffic / activity. This includes number of hits, page views, visits, unique visitors, repeat visitors, and user content preferences and patterns.

In regard to these trends, since the web site was launched in December 2002, traffic has grown from an annualized 48,000 hits per year to more than 2.5 million. Furthermore, the Google search engine ranks it in the top 10 for online sources of "health information for minorities" and "minority health information"—among millions of sources listed.

Special Challenges Confronted as a Service-Oriented Web Site for Multicultural Populations: Lessons Learned

There are a number of special challenges with which the Health Power web site has had to contend. Many of these challenges are related to the fact that it is a service-oriented web site for multicultural populations. Five special challenges may be

elaborated upon, as well as those lessons learned—which have guided our evolution.

1. The funding priorities of governmental agencies and foundations, which are traditional sources of major support for non-profit organizations, do not generally match the profiles of service focused web sites.

2. There is a need to focus intensively on web advertising and sponsorships for revenue production, as an approach which differs from the typical non-profit philosophy.

3. The active pursuit of capital formation through investments is likely to be necessary; this is because a web site undertaking with the broad scope characteristic of Health Power is both highly technical and very costly. Therefore, the requirements are also inconsistent with the typical approach of non-profit operations.

4. The numerous requirements and con-straints of non-profit organizations may well hamper progress. Given the above realities, with which Health Power has been confronted, since our inception, our experience highlights two major points:

- There is a need for more careful definition of such endeavors as for-profit versus non-profit.
- There is a need for more active involvement by organizations, in-cluding more public-private partner-ships and strategic alliances with various agencies and entities.

5. Although governmental agencies, phil-anthropic foundations and many, if not most, non-profit organizations tend to have a bias against for-profit organizations, Health Power has concluded, based on its own experience, that *if multicultural populations are to have their own version of WebMD, which is a major health information resource for main-stream America, then it must be understood that the same business principles that have been necessary for such key players to be* *effective in cyberspace, must be supported for initiatives led by multicultural organizations.*

At the same time, those concerned about multicultural health must carefully evaluate web-based health information initiatives. A viable cyberspace vehicle for imparting health information to multicultural populations must have multicultural leader-ship supporting the endeavor. Specifically, it is important to ensure that web sites targeted to multicultural populations have leadership that can demonstrate high level competencies and values, especially regarding:

➢ Credibility secondary to relevant professional background, and expertise

➢ Cultural competence and a focus on providing culturally relevant information

➢ Communication skills and relevant prior experience, as reflected in the ability to ensure high quality content that communicates information clearly

➢ A quality control mechanism to ensure that the information provided is authoritative, such as through reliance on a variety of experts, editors and advisors who provide consultation services

Conclusion

In this ever changing information and digital age, those concerned about eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities, and narrowing the Digital Divide, must give greater priority to the development and support of committed organizations that have the capacity necessary to assume a leading role in such "high tech" and competitive environments as the World Wide Web. To those interested in developing and operating service oriented web sites, a number of recommendations are in order. These can be summarized via a menu of key elements that may ensure success, including:

➢ Investment in infrastructure development (i.e. it cannot be done on a "shoestring")

➢ Quality site design with periodic up-dates

➢ Professional content development and management

➢ Careful selection of site interactions (i.e. cross-links)

➢ Web marketing, including search engine optimization and marketing

➢ Publicity and external relations

In spite of the various challenges, the Health Power tagline or motto both reflects what we feel the web site reflects, and that which is recommended for whatever one undertakes:

Knowledge + Action = Power!

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